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Role of U.S. In Deal on Prisoners

By Rowland Evans Jr.
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

WASHINGTON.

The Kennedy administration has secretly briefed Congressional leaders of both parties on the plan to barter \$17 million worth of food and medical supplies for 1,100 Cuban freedom fighters now in Castro's jails.

It was understood from responsible sources that John A. McCone, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, had personally discussed not only the elected but also such powerful congressional figures as Sen. Richard B. Russell, D., Ga., and all aspects of the administration's thinking in the matter of prisoners for food.

But these conversations did not even touch on the question of possible U. S. action against Premier Fidel Castro after the prisoners are released and brought to the United States (if the barter is finally arranged). So long as they remain in Castro's jails, the 1,100 Cubans captured in the Bay of Pigs debacle in April, 1953, are hostages of the Cuban government.

Despite this undoubted absence of top-level briefings on possible new U. S. initiatives in the Cuban affair, some Republicans have been convinced that the release of the prisoners would be a prelude to other U. S. moves. It has been

a common belief here among both Democratic and Republican leaders, but one never voiced publicly, that some high officials in the Kennedy administration have been advocating a more positive response to Cuba than the policy adopted by President Kennedy, and expounded at great length to Congressional committees by Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

No Threat—Unless

This policy is that Cuba represents no threat to the U. S. unless it acquires offensive military weapons or unless it tries to export arms and other tools of revolution to other Latin countries.

Mr. McCone's conversations with the leaders of both parties took place earlier this month. It was understood that he gave the following information in his individual talks with the leaders:

1. That James B. Donovan, who has been negotiating the barter, had offered precisely \$17 million worth of medicines and food, to be purchased at rock-bottom wholesale prices from drug manufacturers and other suppliers, and that the maximum cost to the U. S. Treasury, if this money could not be raised elsewhere, would be that amount.
2. That for humanitarian reasons—both the release of the prisoners and the health of women and children now suffering from lack of food and medical care in Cuba—the U. S. could not turn back on the barter.
3. And that it was the intention of the Kennedy administration to underwrite the entire cost, if necessary—assuming the success of Mr. Donovan's negotiations.

A Condition: No Labels

The leaders were also informed that one of Castro's conditions was the removal of all made-in-USA labels from the crates and packages of food and medicine. The general reaction of the Republicans, and of at least one Democrat, was unhappiness at Mr. McCone's message, and Mr. McCone was so informed. In the meantime, Castro has apparently been raising his price and Mr. Donovan has suspended his negotiation.

What connection there may be, if any, between the apparent breakdown of the Donovan negotiations and the new rumors now fling around the capital is anyone's speculation. But this background may prove significant to future events.

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